

SUMMER 2022

HeartCry

MAGAZINE

ROMANIA

FROM **COMMUNISM** TO **CHRIST**

Dear Reader,

The purpose of this publication and our entire media department is two-fold: the glory of God and the edification of Christ's church. Those who behold the works of God are under a solemn stewardship to proclaim them to others. David declared, "The heavens are

telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). How much more should we declare His great works of salvation to His people and among the nations! It would be a great sin for us to "meditate on all God's work and muse on His deeds" (Psalm 77:12) if we did not invite God's people to "come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men" (Psalm 66:5). For this reason, we have made Psalm 22:22-23 the goal of all we publish:

"I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel."

— Psalm 22:22-23

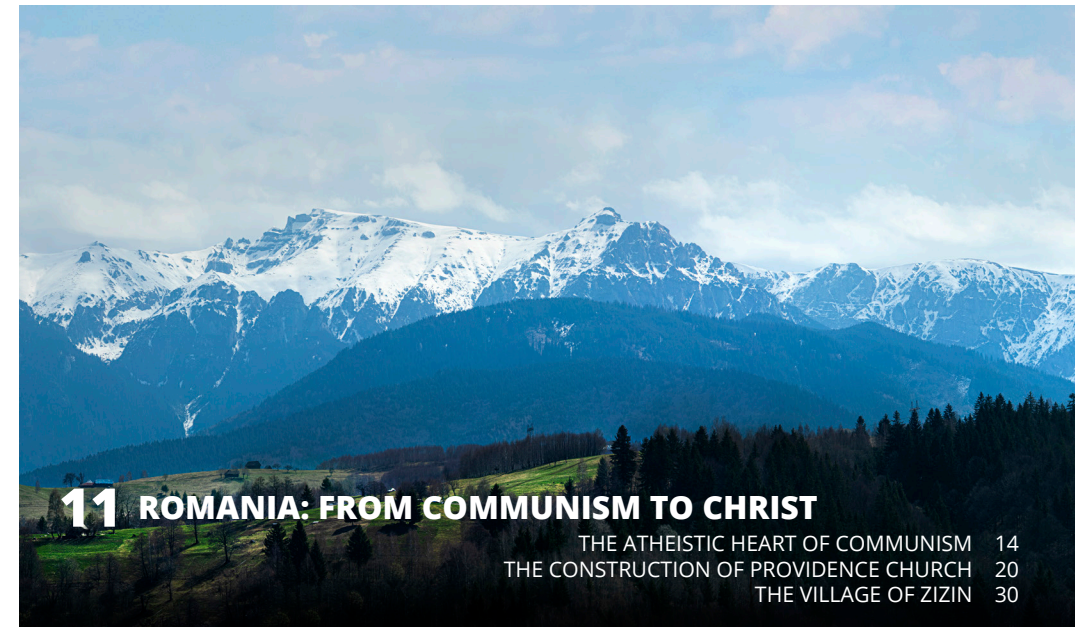
Your Brother,



Paul Washer



A MAN SITS AND LISTENS TO THE GOSPEL PREACHED BY HEARTCRY COORDINATOR HUNTER GATELY IN THE VILLAGE OF ZIZIN, ROMANIA. THE MAN HAS ONLY ONE LEG, IS BLIND, AND SUFFERS FROM DIABETES—YET PRAISED GOD THAT EVENING BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. HE HAS EXPERIENCED TRUE HEALING.



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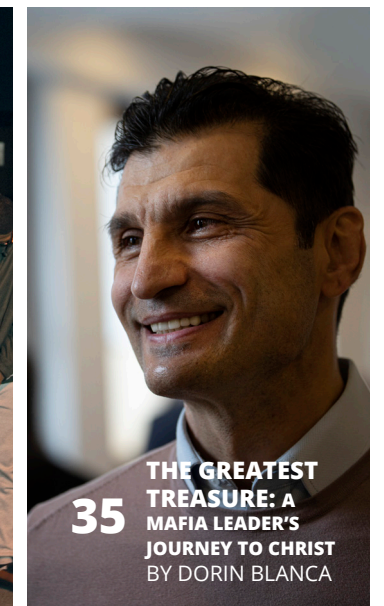
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A NEW TRANSLATION OF THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH INTO THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE

MATT GLASS RECENTLY translated The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith into the Indonesian language. Free Grace Press in Conway, Arkansas, is working with HeartCry to publish the translation, which will then be distributed in Indonesia. The goal is to provide the Indonesian church, especially Baptists, with a clear translation of the most important doctrinal statement in Baptist history. Most Baptists in Indonesia do not agree with many things articulated in the confession, but the purpose of translating it is not ultimately to provide a document that can be completely received and affirmed by every church there. Instead, we hope to provide a guide that can provoke God's people to meditate on each doctrine discussed in the confession and come to their own conscientious conclusion about what the Bible teaches. When those who read the confession investigate its doctrinal teaching in the light of Scripture, we hope they will realize that the confession is an accurate and helpful guide that strengthens their convictions and gives insight into the truth of God's Word. In this way, it will give Indonesian Christians a concise doctrinal summary—a pattern of sound teaching—that will prove helpful to pastors and teachers in the church as they labor to clarify the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

All languages change with time, and the English language is no exception, which is why we chose the modernized edition. In the 17th century, the first readers of the Baptist confession could readily discern the confession's teaching; that's no longer true for most readers in the 21st century. Furthermore, the archaic language in the original confession imposes many challenges on translators, challenges which can be partially mitigated by using the modern version as the source text. Translation philosophy need not be detailed here; it is sufficient to say that this translation was translated to express accurately the modern English version in a manner that is clear and idiomatic in the Indonesian language. Though sentence structure and word order in each paragraph have been changed so that the confession is easy to read for 21st century Indonesians, the meaning in each paragraph has been carefully preserved so that the confession's theological content is reflected faithfully.

Our prayer is that this small book will function as a good teacher and help God's people in Indonesia not to be led astray by false teaching. May they achieve the unity of the faith and the knowledge of God's Son, growing to a measure of maturity that is measured by Christ's own fullness. May they speak the truth in love and grow in all things according to Christ (Eph. 4:13-15). May this confession, then, be a road sign to help them on that journey.




THE SOURCE FOR THE TRANSLATION was the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English published by Founders Press.

HEARTCRY MISSIONARY MATT GLASS
TRANSLATING THE 1689 INTO INDONESIAN.

The Need and the Opportunity

Written by **Paul Washer**



THE BEAUTIFUL VILLAGE OF KŁAJ, POLAND. ONLY A TINY FRACTION OF THE POPULATION OF THIS COUNTRY ARE PROFESSING EVANGELICALS, AND MANY OF THOSE FOLLOW A PROSPERITY GOSPEL. THE NEED IS TRULY GREAT AND THE LABORERS ARE FEW.

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

- Matthew 9:36-38

The harvest is more plentiful than ever, the door of opportunity is open wider than ever, and the workers are as few as ever.¹ The facts are undeniable. There are currently well over 7 billion people living on this planet—in fact, it is predicted that the global population will reach 8 billion in 2023.² Less than 8% of today’s population considers themselves to be Evangelical Christians.³ Additionally, the world’s population can be divided into an estimated 16,787 people groups, 6,947 of which are still considered unreached—more than 2.8 billion individuals are currently out of range of the gospel.⁴ There are also an estimated seven thousand languages in the world (and countless dialects). Of these languages, more than two thousand are without the Scriptures.⁵

These figures are devastating, especially

upon realizing that the problem appears even more acute in many of the reached areas of the world because Christians languish for a lack of biblical knowledge. This results in doctrinal and ethical error, syncretism,⁶ and worldliness. As in the days of Nehemiah, those who would build up the wall of Zion and extend it must fight on all sides. Not only are there thousands of unreached people groups who are dying without the gospel, but there are also just as many reached people groups who are stumbling in immaturity and need greater instruction in the gospel. Thus, we must adopt the twofold ministry of the Apostle Paul. First, we must aspire to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named so that “they who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.”⁷ Second, we must also labor where Christ has already been proclaimed,

persevering according to His power, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.⁸

The world and the church’s needs are greater than ever, and yet so are the opportunities. The stage has been set for possibly the greatest advancement in missions that the church has ever known. Political upheavals have opened the door to countries that were previously closed, and all the great “-isms” of secular man have fallen under the weight of their own error. *Humanism* has left our world disillusioned and cynical. *Secularism* has left it soulless and empty. *Materialism* has left both the “haves” and the “have-nots” equally miserable and constantly at war. *Sexual liberationism* has stripped the individual of human dignity, exiled beauty, and driven a knife through the heart of innocence. Finally, the current revival of *paganism* has left men praying to rocks, hugging trees, and killing babies. The enlightenment of the twentieth century, which was expected to bring peace and prosperity to mankind, has spawned more ignorance, poverty, immorality, and violence than any scholar could have predicted or any prophet could have foretold.

Paraphrasing Charles Dickens in his work, *A Tale of Two Cities*, we may well say, “these are the worst of times, these are the best of times.” The present world’s stage provides a context for the church to do great things; yet the church seems uneducated, distracted, and impotent. We stand at an open door of great opportunity, but do we have the will and strength to enter through that door? Like Jonathan in I Samuel, will we cross over into battle to see what the Lord will do for us, believing that He is not restrained to save by

FOOTNOTES

¹Matthew 9:37; Luke 10:2

²worldometers.info/world-population

³Operation World, p.1, 3

⁴Joshua Project

⁵Operation World, p.1

⁶Syncretism refers to the merging of distinct and often contradictory religious and cultural ideas (e.g. the merging of Buddhist or Islamic teaching with orthodox Christianity, or the entrance of secular philosophy or pop culture into the church).

⁷Romans 15:20 – “And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation; but as it is written, ‘They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.’”

⁸Colossians 1:28-29 – “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

many or by few?⁹ Or like King Hezekiah in II Kings, will we only lament that “children have come to birth and there is no strength to deliver?”¹⁰ The world is ripe for the gospel; will we meet the challenge? This is not a time for small hearts, timid spirits, or uninstructed minds. As the prophet Isaiah admonished the fearful King Hezekiah, we must trust in the God who rules the nations.¹¹ We must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.¹² We must be willing, even anxious, to sacrifice—either by going or by supporting those who go!

Man’s war against the truth has devastated the world, but the greater the darkness the greater the opportunity for light to shine forth distinctly and purely. In the midst of a hostile scenario reminiscent of the first century, we are afforded the opportunity to live like first-century Christians and to turn the world right side up.¹³ However, Scripture makes it clear that only “the people who know their God will display strength and take action.”¹⁴ The questions confronting any who would go into the mission field are: “Do I possess such a knowledge of God? Is it a reality in my life? And can I communicate it to others?”

The great need for harvest workers in global missions cannot be exaggerated. There is much to be done and little time to do it. Nevertheless, the need that is before us must not drive us to pragmatism, but to the Scriptures and prayer. The solution will not be found in the heart or mind of man, but through a careful exegesis of the biblical text and our adherence to the truth in it. To find the answer for all that afflicts the modern missionary movement, we need not look forward to discover something new; rather, if we look backward, we can rediscover something tried and true: the eternal truths of God’s immutable Word! If the reader learns anything from this treatise, let it be that the Scriptures are sufficient for every mission endeavor and for every missionary to “be adequate, equipped for every good work”¹⁵ in the Great Commission. To seek for any help

The Gospel Among Cannibals

“Several years after the Lord saved me, I wanted to find the darkest, most remote place I could find and submerge myself in it. The Lord answered my prayer and placed us among the Korowai Tribe, also known as the ‘Tree House People.’ The Korowai people were cannibals who worshiped an evil spirit to have success in their homes and gardens. By God’s providence, many clans moved from their tree houses to form more than ten villages in the north. This gave us greater opportunities to minister to the Korowai people along the three river systems.

My vision is and always has been to preach the good news of Jesus Christ and to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. I quickly learned that this was not going to be an easy task. Daily fights consumed much of my time, sickness seemed to plague us at every turn, and men professing to know Christ were trying to destroy the church with violence. Day after day, I taught the Scriptures, only to find the people doing the opposite of what I was teaching.

But praise be to God, after ten years of laboring with these people, we have churches established in each village, Korowai believers leading the worship, a northern Korowai language translation of the Salvation History Catechisms, a school with 66 children, a daily clinic to treat the sick, and a children’s dormitory. Please pray for all these efforts, that God will be glorified as the gospel goes forth in the northern Korowai region!”

—Paul Snider,
HeartCry Missionary



HEARTCRY MISSIONARY PAUL SNIDER
TEACHES MEMBERS OF THE KOROWAI TRIBE
AT THE CHURCH IN DANOWAGE, INDONESIA.

outside of Scripture is to build the foundation of our missionary endeavors upon sand¹⁶—in which case, despite all our earnestness and activity, the Day will reveal that little has been accomplished for the kingdom and that we have been unfaithful stewards. However, if we are tenacious in building our foundation on the firm ground of the Scriptures and conforming our doctrine and mission methodology to what is written therein, then we can be confident that we have been wise master builders whose labor will bring reward.¹⁷

The world appears to be darkening. There are crises in every sphere—social, political, economic, and even ecological. Not just individuals—entire nations appear to be trem-



REV. JOHN HARPER

bling with regard to what the future may bring. Yet these “worst of times” for the world are the “best of times” for the gospel! As man’s confidence in himself continues to crumble, we must proclaim the only One who is truly worthy of all confidence—the One who holds the future in His hands, because He is the Author of it. Amid the breaking up of humanity’s ship, we must not merely cry aloud from the decks that men should look to Jesus and be saved; we must throw ourselves into the raging sea and take hold of as many drowning souls as possible. We should imitate the heroics of John Harper, the passenger on the Titanic who refused rescue so that he might reach as many dying persons as possible with the gospel. Regarding his heroics, Douglas W. Mize writes:

“When the Titanic hit the iceberg, Harper successfully led his daughter to a lifeboat. Being a widower, he may have been allowed to join her but instead forsook his own rescue, choosing to provide the masses with one more chance to know Christ. Harper ran person to person, passionately telling others about Christ. As the water began to submerge the ‘unsinkable’ ship, Harper was heard shouting, ‘women, children, and the unsaved into the lifeboats.’ Rebuffed by a certain man at the offer of salvation Harper gave him his own life vest, saying, ‘you need this more than I do.’ Up until the last moment on the ship Harper pleaded with people to give their lives to Jesus. The ship disappeared beneath the deep frigid waters leaving hundreds floundering in its wake with no realistic chance for rescue. Harper struggled through hypothermia to swim to as many people as he could, still sharing the gospel. Harper eventually would lose his battle with hypothermia but not before giving many people one last glorious gospel witness. Four years after the tragedy at a Titanic survivor’s meeting in Ontario, Canada, one survivor recounted his interaction with Harper in the middle of the icy waters of the Atlantic. He testified he was clinging to ship debris when Harper swam up to him, twice challenging him with a biblical invitation to ‘believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ He rejected the offer once. Yet given the second chance and with miles of water beneath his feet, the man gave his life to Christ. Then as Harper succumbed to his watery grave, this new believer was rescued by a returning lifeboat. As he concluded his remarks at the Ontario meeting of survivors he simply stated, ‘I am the last convert of John Harper.’”¹⁸



DR. SINCLAIR FERGUSON SPEAKS THROUGH A TRANSLATOR AT THE BONNE NOUVELLE CONFERENCE (IN ASSOCIATION WITH HEARTCRY) IN PARIS, FRANCE, EARLIER THIS YEAR. THIS SPRAWLING METROPOLIS COULD NOT BE MORE UNLIKE THE JUNGLES OF INDONESIA—YET JUST AS SPIRITUALLY DARK, IF NOT MORE SO.

My dear reader, we do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we do know what we should be doing. We must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature and to every nation under heaven, laboring with all our might in the power of the Holy Spirit to present every believer complete in Christ—conformed to His immaculate image. This great goal, this irrevocable command, this unrelenting passion, this magnificent obsession ought to act as blinders around our eyes so that we are not distracted by less meaningful tasks. It must function as a compass to keep us on a straight course. Let our ears be deaf to lesser causes! Let us risk, fight, and prevail! There is too much at stake and too much glory to be gained for the name of Christ for us to turn back, loose our hand from the plow, or become distracted by insignificant things. Let us labor until His name is great among the nations and until incense is offered to His name in every place.¹⁹ Let us give our lives until the kingdom is consummated and we behold with our own eyes a great multitude that no one can count—from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues—standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”²⁰



Paul Washer is the Founder and Missions Director of HeartCry Missionary Society.

⁹I Samuel 14:6

¹⁰II Kings 19:3; Isaiah 37:3

¹⁰II Kings 19:3; Isaiah 37:3

¹¹II Kings 19:6, 20ff

¹²Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2

¹³Acts 17:6 (NKJV) – “But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”

¹⁴Daniel 11:32

¹⁵II Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶Matthew 7:26-27

¹⁷I Corinthians 3:10

¹⁸Douglas W. Mize is minister of evangelism and discipleship at Taylors First Baptist Church in South Carolina. The article was posted by the Baptist Press on Friday, April 13, 2012 (baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/as-titanic-sank-he-pleaded-believe-in-the-lord-jesus).

¹⁹Malachi 1:11

²⁰Revelation 7:9-10

ROMANIA

FROM **COMMUNISM**

TO **CHRIST**





THE BISERICA NEAGRĂ ("BLACK CHURCH")
SILHOUETTED AGAINST AN EVENING SKY. BUILT
DURING THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY, IT IS A
PROMINENT LANDMARK IN BRAŞOV, ROMANIA.

THE ATHEISTIC HEART OF COMMUNISM

In the last three decades, the gospel of Jesus Christ has had a powerful impact upon the country of Romania and has resulted in the Eastern European nation having a significant impact upon the world. Since the fall of communism in 1989, Romanian Christians have scattered throughout Europe and the Western world carrying the gospel that brought them out of darkness and death and into the glorious light and life of Christ.

COMMUNISM IN ROMANIA, under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceauşescu, was driven by a malicious atheism. This was neither unique to Romania nor specific to Ceauşescu, as hatred of God is an intrinsic aspect of communism itself. Underlying its strategies and blueprints is the conceit that man is a social construction, not a divine creation—a biological machine to be engineered, not a soul with a nature to be cultivated. It is a necessary function of the communist apparatus that belief in God is either emptied of significance or eradicated completely.¹

For years, Ceauşescu's regime was a reign of terror for churches everywhere. There were churches allowed to stand, but most of these were structures of state devotion; there were priests in these churches to hear confessions, but some of them wore hidden tape recorders to transmit these confessions directly to the securitate (the secret police).² Ceauşescu personally detested the very sight of churches, such that he had eighteen church buildings demolished in Bucharest simply because they stood alongside the roads of his dai-

FOOTNOTES

¹For more on this see: Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich (1909). "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion." *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 15.

Scruton, Roger. "Humans hunger for the sacred." *The Spectator*, 2014.

"The Devil." *Modern Philosophy*, 1994.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1973. (In particular see chapter "The Ascent.")

"Acceptance Speech for the Templeton Prize." 1983.

²Deletant, Dennis (1995). *Ceauşescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania*.



“In the same way, the reconstruction of the church today involves not so much the rebuilding of physical temples as the proclamation of faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

SORIN PRODAN SERVES

AS THE HEARTCRY DIRECTOR IN EASTERN EUROPE. HE DIRECTS MINISTRIES IN ROMANIA, MOLDOVA, AND UKRAINE. HIS RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE OVERSEEING AND TRAINING MISSIONARIES IN EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP, AND CHURCH PLANTING. PICTURED LEFT: SORIN MEETS WITH OTHER ROMANIAN PASTORS FOR FELLOWSHIP, PRAYER, AND TEACHING.

an evil state is not to immediately enter a land flowing with milk and honey; but, like the Israelites, only to flee into that wilderness which is freedom. It is here in this wilderness where the real work of obedience (and obedient construction) must take place. But one price of freedom, one danger of the wilderness, is to be overcrowded by peddlers of cheap gospels and counterfeit faiths. The wilderness of freedom is not safe. In the West, believers have so luxuriated in this freedom that for decades they have all but ceased patrolling the borders between truth and lies, only to awaken to find their churches ransacked and their children carried off by ideologues.

ly commute and he did not wish to look at them. Other church buildings he ordered to have physically moved some hundred feet out of sight. That Ceaușescu spared these from demolition is simply testament to their hollowness.³

Communist dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote of the similar erosion of churches in his homeland Russia—either by swift demolition or the slow infestation of propaganda. “Our ancestors put their best into these stones and these belfries,” Solzhenitsyn lamented, “all their knowledge and all their faith.”⁴ So then, what was the object of the demolition—walls and roofs or knowledge and faith? “The rats have nibbled the church

down to its roots,” wrote Romanian poet Mircea Dinescu.⁵ Indeed, the physical destruction of church buildings—from the great ecclesiastical architectures of Bucharest to the small village churches of the countryside—was only a symbol of the wider suppression of the Christian faith itself. In the same way, the *reconstruction* of the church today involves not so much the rebuilding of physical temples as the proclamation of faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The freedom from communism in 1989 has offered conditions in which this work of reconstruction can be accomplished. But it is equally vital to note that this freedom has not, however, been a cure-all for the dying

church. “After Romania gained its freedom, there was an influx of missionaries and teachers from the West,” says HeartCry missionary Sorin Prodan. “Some were good, but most were not. They began to preach a cheap gospel, and most Romanians felt something was wrong with it. When we were under communism, to follow Christ was suffering. Now we were hearing a different story—that it would be easy.”

Put another way, to escape the tyranny of

There is something to be said for the sanctifying pressure of a totalitarian state, in which being an underground church means posting literal sentries by the door to keep watch, peering out at regular intervals through window slats. In such cases, belief in God is a radical proposition. Only a substantial gospel is worth that belief when its price is blood. How could a cheap and hollow gospel even begin to offer consolation for the unspeakable suffering that is but one day in

³Danta, Darrick (1993). *Ceausescu's Bucharest*, Geographical Review.

⁴Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr (2015). “A Journey Along the Oka.” *Stories and Prose Poems*.

⁵Dinescu, Mircea (2012). “A Letter to Mother.” *Asymptote Journal*.

the life of a communist citizen? Only the true gospel is a counterweight to that.

It is tempting to think of totalitarianism as the unilateral oppression of the innocent masses by an evil government. But in truth a totalitarian state can only develop when everyone conspires to bring it into existence. At various gradations along the ranks of totalitarian society, every citizen must grant his approval (or conformity) to state-sanctioned falsehood while refusing to speak the truth. What makes totalitarianism a uniquely intolerable burden is the knowledge of individuals that they themselves have a share in the guilt.⁶ “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” This is why the gospel in its fullness is the greatest mortal threat to totalitarianism wherever it manifests, because it tears apart the false edifice with this paradoxical truth: that every individual person bears both infinite value *and* infinite guilt before God, who nevertheless offers His forgiveness. The liberation in this forgiveness is, principally, a revolution of the human heart.

Though a great degree of political freedom has been achieved in Romania since 1989 (and, by many comparisons, so has a much greater quality of life), what no metric can measure are the psychological and spiritual scars, the burden of trauma and grief borne by unseen hearts, and the number of souls yet enslaved to the tyranny of sin. To paraphrase Isaiah Berlin, there is still a residue of communism that the years have not rubbed out. The wounds of the communist scourge have not been fully healed; the slaves of the atheist state have not been fully liberated.

⁶This is now largely the consensus view among scholars of totalitarianism. But the observation was first made by the communists themselves, who designed their propaganda with precisely this understanding that all citizens must willingly conform to the state. Any person who would not conform was, in the words of Hannah Arendt, “a dangerous nuisance.” (See Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*.)

ALTHOUGH COMMUNISM FELL IN '89, ITS MEMORY LINGERS. PICTURED BELOW, HARSH CONCRETE APARTMENT BLOCKS LINE THE ROADWAYS IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF BUCHAREST.



“That first Sunday was **like the discovery of a whole new universe**. That was, I believe, the day of my conversion. From that point, I was constrained by an overwhelming love for the Lord, which continued in spite of persecution that came later.”



SORIN PRODAN STANDS IN FRONT OF PROVIDENCE CHURCH IN BRAŞOV, ROMANIA. SORIN SERVES ALONGSIDE FELLOW ELDER ION TOMECI IN PREACHING AND SHEPHERDING THE MEMBERS THERE.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROVIDENCE CHURCH

REGARDING THE WORKS of Jesus, John wrote, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) In a limited manner, the same might be said of God’s work in Romania and through the Romanian church. Only eternity will tell of all that God has done! In the following story, we will learn of just one of these works of divine providence that came to fruition through the ministry of Sorin Prodan and the elders and congregation of Providence Church in the city of Braşov.

Sorin Prodan knew from the early years of his faith that it was his life’s calling to plant churches. “My desire for church planting was natural,” he says. “It was always more attractive to me than ministering in an already established church. Looking back, I see how this desire was deep in my heart. Even when I was in high school and living under communist rule, I would travel to different villages in order to evangelize the lost, visit and encourage small churches, and search out the need to plant new churches. I always felt a great excitement in my heart to start something from scratch. Even now, I feel that joy when thinking about going into a new city where there is little gospel presence. I want to step in, pray, build a vision, and start planting.”

One can easily imagine that Sorin’s passion for church planting has its roots in the circumstances surrounding his conversion. As a child growing up in a non-Christian family, he only attended on rare occasions an Eastern



ION TOMECCI GREETES A GYPSY FAMILY FOR THE FIRST TIME AND SHAKES HANDS WITH A SMALL BOY BEFORE THE MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE AT PROVIDENCE CHURCH IN BRAȘOV. ION SERVES AS AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH, WORKING FOR THE LORD ALONGSIDE SORIN PRODAN.

Orthodox Church, which offered no real gospel. However, one day, Sorin providentially encountered a biblical church—or, rather, a biblical church encountered him.

“It was a small, underground Baptist church that had moved across the street from where my parents lived,” says Sorin. “The church rented a room from our neighbors and began holding a worship service there. As neighbors, we were invited to attend, and (with a degree of prejudice) I went. That first Sunday was like the discovery of a whole new universe. That was, I believe, the day of my conversion. From that point, I was constrained by an overwhelming love for the Lord, which continued in spite of persecution that came later. My excitement was so great that I went

to school and began sharing with my classmates and all the other kids, totally unaware that my newfound faith did not at all fit with the ideology of the communist system. I was surprised to find that my teachers did not appreciate that I went to church and worshiped God. Eventually, they forced me to choose between being expelled from school or giving up my church. Beyond my power of reason and logic, I simply said, ‘I cannot give it up. If you want to kick me out of school, do it.’ And they did.”

One year later, in 1989, Romania achieved its freedom from communism. In 1990, for the first time in decades, Easter services were broadcast on Romanian television. However, despite the thaw of the regime and the dawn

of a new spring era, Sorin shares that the Romanian people were starving for spiritual food. There were faithful Romanian preachers and churches, but there was also a flood of western Evangelicals who brought a superficial gospel that resulted in false converts and carnality. In was in the midst of this conflict that Sorin Prodan and Paul Washer became friends and co-laborers. Sorin explains:

“The president of the Baptist Union had invited Brother Paul to preach on Sunday morning. Paul was young, and the president did not expect him to preach so powerfully. When he came back that night to preach again, the church was overrun with people—there was no room in the whole church. People were standing in the aisles, near the stage,

everywhere. There was such a hunger for the gospel!”

These were the beginnings of HeartCry in Romania. Soon after, Sorin was named HeartCry’s Director for Eastern Europe. In the decades that have followed, Sorin has dedicated himself to evangelism, preaching, and training men to be pastors and missionaries. He has also been instrumental in planting five churches, the latest one in 2010. It is called Providence Church, and Sorin is one of its pastors. Sorin says:

“We prayed for the amazing idea of establishing a church in Romania. We prayed for a place, and the Lord led us to the city of Brașov. At the beginning, we rented an apartment and met with a small group for Bible

studies and prayer; the Lord blessed the ministry in an amazing way. Within a year, we had more than twenty-five people meeting in that small apartment.”

It quickly became apparent that the growing congregation needed facilities of its own. So began a hunt for property that Sorin refers to as “a saga of God’s providence and grace.” Sorin initially considered the old buildings that were built by the communists, but these were crumbling and poorly located. Finally, he called Brother Paul at HeartCry, whose response was: “Keep looking. Raise your eyes higher, and look further.”

Not long afterward, Sorin found a property in the very center of the city. However, the price was *astronomic*. The first time Sorin called the owner, he was informed that the asking price for the property alone was \$1,200,000. Sorin’s reply was, “Sir, that is too much—way beyond our budget!” Despite his initial phone conversation, Sorin kept calling. The price was lowered each time, but Sorin’s response was always the same: “We have a specific budget.” Finally, the owner agreed to sell the property for \$200,000. Sorin explains:

“We saw God’s hand in the offer, so with HeartCry’s help we bought the property. Then, HeartCry came alongside us and also provided the financial support to begin the construction of a facility. Now our church is located right by the city hall, the university, and the city park where we do evangelism. We are literally at ground zero in the city of Braşov. Our church is the most visible church building in the city!

“We know that the Lord brought us to this place with a purpose. It is not by chance that it was given to us. We realize that God’s hand was at work in a mighty way in everything. From beginning to end, we saw signs of His providence every day and everywhere. That is why we named the church, ‘Providence Church.’ We want everyone to know that we are truly grateful to everyone who gave so generously to HeartCry so we could construct this facility for our congregation and for the training of ministers in Eastern Europe. We believe that we will train men of God in this place for many generations.”

The First HeartCry Mission in Romania

“I grew up in Moldova, but came to Romania for my studies. It was there that I became good friends and classmates with Sorin Prodan. When we both graduated, someone asked us to come to their town to see if there was any chance that a mission could be started there. Sorin and I both went.

My plans had never been to live in the village of Pucioasa. I wanted to go back home to Moldova. But I was reading in the book of Acts where the Lord had told the Apostle Paul to stay and preach in a certain area, and I felt that this reading was a special message for me. In Acts, the Lord had commanded Paul to stay for a year and a half, so I decided to do the same.

I’ve now been here for 23 years. Pucioasa Church was founded in 1998, and is the first HeartCry mission established in Romania. The Lord has provided so much through the years.

We now have three different buildings that make up the church property. One is where we worship, another is used as a kindergarten and after school program. The third building is used as a music school. We have so many teenagers here in the village, and as a musician, I saw that a way to reach them could be through music. These kids don’t come from believing families. I wanted to involve them in some way where they could hear the gospel.

We host free music concerts and recitals. People who would never have come to the church find themselves in our church listening to music. After these concerts, we invite them to our Sunday service, and many come. It’s so nice to be able to share the Gospel with people in this way, and I am so grateful to the Lord that we can have this opportunity.”

—Nicolae Vulpe
Pastor of Pucioasa Church

HEARTCRY MISSIONARY NICOLAE VULPE PLAYS THE PIANO
INSIDE ONE OF THE SIX MISSION OUTREACH POINTS ESTABLISHED
BY THE CHURCH IN PUCIOASA, WHICH HE CURRENTLY PASTORS.





THE NEWLY CONSTRUCTED PROVIDENCE CHURCH BUILDING (WHITE BUILDING ABOVE WITH BLACK ROOF) WAS COMPLETED IN 2020. IN ADDITION TO BEING A PLACE TO WORSHIP, IT IS ALSO A CONFERENCE AND MISSIONARY TRAINING CENTER. IT HAS BEDROOM APARTMENTS ON THE TOP FLOORS TO HOUSE TRAVELING MISSIONARIES.



THE CITY OF BRASOV. ICONIC RED ROOFS IN A STRIKING MOSAIC AMONG THE ROLLING HILLS AND SNOWCAPPED CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS. IN THE DISTANCE ARE THE IMPOSING CONCRETE APARTMENT BLOCKS FROM THE CEAUSESCU ERA.

THE VILLAGE OF ZIZIN

SCATTERED IN BETWEEN Romania's large cities and cultural centers are myriads of small villages where the gospel has also made substantial inroads. One of these is the village of Zizin. The following is brief account of its history, the triumph of the gospel, and the planting of a church.

THE VILLAGE OF ZIZIN in Romania should not now exist. Under the regime of communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, it was slated for destruction by the 1980s. Its villagers were to be driven from their homes and “resettled” near Brașov—shoved into apartments the size of prison cells. These were the communes of communism, brutalist blocks of concrete designed after the *Khrushchyovkas* (*i.e.* communal apartments) of sister Russia.⁷ All tenants were made to pay rent for the privilege of their new “modernized” homes, whose amenities included: one kitchen and bathroom shared between ten families, often no running water, no electricity at night, and no heating in winter. Many tenants were forced to give up their professions and incomes; farmers were removed from their family farms and lifestyle that had been passed down from generation to generation. None were offered compensation for their losses. Meanwhile, bulldozers plowed through villages, destroying everything.⁸

This was the *sistematizare* (systematization) strategy, by which Ceaușescu promised to usher in utopia. The plan was twofold: villages would be bulldozed, composted, and

turned into arable land, on which new collectivized farms could produce an abundance for the nation; simultaneously, ethnic minorities and Romanians would be “consolidated” (the official euphemism) into a single communist family. Old customs and traditions—especially the one called “Christianity”—would be discarded and stamped out.

A hundred miles south of Zizin, the commune of Snagov is an example of this “consolidation.” Several surrounding villages were demolished, nearly one thousand villagers removed and placed in concrete apartment cells. Some died in the process. Others described their fate as “wretched and miserable – the equivalent of a death sentence.”⁹

Somehow, the village of Zizin was spared. This was not the result of Ceaușescu's mercy, but the gross incompetence of socialist planning. In order to fund the *sistematizare* project, the communist state borrowed exorbitantly from foreign nations. Then, under pressure of Western scrutiny, Ceaușescu scrambled to pay off national debt. Even though this resulted in the sparing of Zizin and other villages, this mercy came at a price: Ceaușescu's method of repaying debt was exporting a majority

FOOTNOTES

⁷See: Nikita Khrushchev's “Industrialized Building Speech” from 1954.

⁸Turnock, David (1991). “The Planning of Rural Settlement in Romania.” *The Geographical Journal*.

⁹Ibid.

RIGHT: NICOLAE (HOLDING POINTER) AND ELENA CEAUȘESCU AND COMPANY EXAMINE A MODEL CITY AND DISCUSS SISTEMATIZARE STRATEGIES.

BELOW: EVANGELISTS ALEX PALADE & EMANUEL IVAN WALK DOWN A SIDE STREET IN ZIZIN ON THEIR WAY TO THE SINGLE ROOM WHERE THE CHURCH MEETS FOR WORSHIP. IT IS AMAZING TO WATCH HOW GOD USES THE HUMBLE LABOR OF TWO EVANGELISTS TO UNDO YEARS OF PLANNING BY POWERFUL MEN WHO HATE HIM.



portion of the nation's food. So, while villagers kept their villages, they nearly starved, subsisting on whatever meager portions that were rationed to them. Typical of the self-destructive paradox of communism, what was in one hand a mercy was in the other a scourge.

The purpose of *sistematizare* was not only designed to achieve the economic objectives of socialism, but also to stamp out all faith in God. Village churches were notably among the bulldozed rubble, but neither churches nor chapels had a place in the communal apartment blocks. "Consolidation" in the fullest sense required tenants to alter their behaviors, traditions, and beliefs.¹⁰

Although the entire Romanian populace suffered under communism, the Romani or Gypsy people who now populate the village of Zizin suffered in a singular manner. They experienced the same oppressions alongside all other Romanians, but they were also forced to face hardships that were unique to their people. The Romani were the only ethnic minority not granted official status as a "co-inhabiting nationality." This meant that they were entirely overlooked by the government, without any official voice to represent their interests and needs, at a time when all citizens of communism were wholly dependent on the tightfisted hand of the state for their survival. Because the Gypsies were traditionally a nomadic people, roaming from village to village, the imposition of *sistematizare* required that their way of life be virtually stamped out. Some were assimilated into communal apartment blocks. Others were forced by circumstance to abandon the traditional professions and trades which had been theirs for generations. Because the Romani do not

have a cultivated language of their own, their social legacy is enshrined in the practice of their customs and traditions. With these gone, the preservation of their cultural identity became all but impossible. Thus, alongside the starvation, the dehumanizing conditions, and the paranoia of state surveillance, the Romani people also suffered the slow death of their own cultural memory.¹¹

Today, nearly three decades since the fall of communism, the bright red roofs of Zizin stand as a testimony to the village's perseverance and to God's grace. Many of the buildings that were constructed in the nineteenth century still remain, including the childhood home of Hungarian poet Zajzoni Rab István, whose name means, "Prisoner of Zizin." On his tombstone reads the inscription, "Though your name is 'Prisoner,' your soul and your song are free."¹²

Today all of Zizin's villagers are freed from communism, but some are free indeed—free from sin and death—"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). This truth is wonderfully illustrated in the new church plant in the city. The following is an account of an evening service that was attended by the HeartCry media team and others:

IT IS NIGHT, AND WE ARE GATHERED for a worship service in one of the houses of Zizin. It has only one room—on one side a bed, on the other side a table and kitchen cabinets. Here we sit, shoulder to shoulder, in chairs lined about the walls. Eight of us are a team from HeartCry, the others are residents of Zizin. The room is so overcrowded that the heat is as stifling as summer, while outside there is a temperate spring evening and the dampness of fog.

The service begins with vibrant worship. Afterwards, HeartCry Coordinator Hunter Gately teaches from the Scriptures about

¹⁰See: "Human Rights in Romania: Hearing Before the House of Representatives, Ninety-ninth Congress."

U.S. Congress, 1985. "The State of Human Rights in Romania." U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, December 1988.

¹¹Achim, Viorel (1998). "The gypsies during the communist regime." *The Roma in Romanian History*.

¹²Istvan, Zajzoni Rab. "Válogatott versei." *Haladó Hagymányaink*, 1959. (Gyula, Halász, editor.)

THE CHURCH IN ZIZIN BEGAN IN THIS ROOM IN AVA'S HOME. FROM LEFT, AVA, HER SON LOTZI, HEARTCRY EVANGELISTS EMANUEL IVAN AND ALEX PALADE.



God's goodness. "God will give you everything you need," he proclaims. The listeners do not interpret his words as promises of material abundance or an easy life. For them, it is a confession of a radical faith that trusted in Christ during the many hard winters of communism when they were freezing for lack of heat and having to survive on a few ounces of rationed bread! In response to the proclamation of God's goodness, an elderly woman cries out, "Amen!" Her name is Ava, and she was the first convert in the village of Zizin. She holds her worn-out Bible on her lap, its cover is stretched at the spine, and it is bulging with dozens of bookmarks. She uses her hand to wipe away the tears that fill her eyes and are running down her cheeks. Her disabled son Lotzi sits beside her.

There are many others in the congregation, but space allows us to mention only a few. One man, who is nearly blind and an amputee, sits at attention with both hands perched on his cane. He listens intently. The couple next to him, Marin and his wife, are the owners of the house. They and their friend beside them were baptized last year before the entire village. Another man in the room is a recent convert who has been rescued from a life of alcoholism. He came to faith only a few weeks ago. Later in the evening, two young girls entered out of curiosity, surprised to find such a large group cramped in such a little place.

After the service, we stand with Ava and her son as the others are leaving, and we hear more about the story of their conversion. Alex Palade, a HeartCry-supported evangelist, had driven into the village on an errand years ago. Upon seeing them walking down the street, he stopped his car and spoke to them about Christ—His life, death, resurrection, and power to save. Some weeks later, a large crowd gathered from the village to witness Ava and Lotzi's baptisms. These were the beginnings of the church of Zizin.

In conjunction with HeartCry, there are plans underway to construct a church building on a nearby vacant lot. The sanctuary will

"An elderly woman cries out, 'Amen!' Her name is Ava, and she was the first convert in the village of Zizin. She holds her worn out Bible on her lap. Its cover is stretched at the spine, and it is bulging with dozens of bookmarks.

be designed to be easily expanded as the congregation grows. Zizin is divided among three ethnic boroughs—Hungarian, Romanian, and Romani or Gypsies. The chapel will be located in the Gypsy neighborhood. As Paul writes:

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." — Galatians 3:27-29

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the village of Zizin was home to a well-known spa that was fed by natural springs. Many believed that these pools—rich in minerals—had potent medicinal properties and could cure disease. People came to Zizin to dip into its pools and be healed.¹³ Throughout the years of communist oppression, the spa's legacy was reduced to only a memory. However, with the coming of the gospel, a true fountain of healing has opened, a wellspring for the healing of body, mind, and soul. As the prophet Zechariah proclaimed, "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity" (Zechariah 13:1).



¹³Zizin (Zajzon). Terra Barcensis. Retrieved July 2022 from <https://www.terrabcensis.ro/en/zizin-zajzon/>

THE GREATEST TREASURE: A MAFIA LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CHRIST

Testimony by Dorin Blanca • Translation by Sorin Prodan

When I was seventeen, I rebelled against my parents' authority to pursue the pleasures of life. From early childhood, I loved sports, especially martial arts: judo and wrestling. These disciplines gave me confidence that I could defend myself—and that I could be an aggressor.

In time, I began to feel superior to others my age. I hung around with the older guys on the wrestling team so that they would teach me different techniques (tricks) to take advantage of others—on and off the mat. I also learned how to take advantage of young ladies in immoral relationships and fell into heavy drinking. My only purpose in life was entertainment. I even began to cross legal boundaries.

I turned twenty-one a year after the revolution in Romania and the fall of communism. From that point, my vision was only to make money and live an immoral life surrounded by women. I wanted to *be somebody*. This ambition eventually led me into gang life.

I did not know much about the Romanian mafia, but I was interested in making money and had no problems with illegal activity. Because of my ambition and aggression, it was easy for me to find a place in a gang. I found friendships and connections there. I was fond of thinking that we were like a flock of ravens hunting their scampering prey—a collective with a singular purpose.

I soon earned a reputation for being a violent man. Even my friends in the gang were

afraid of me. Because of this, I quickly rose through the ranks to become a leader in one of the most well-known mafias in the city of Braşov. I would venture to say that I became one of the ten most powerful mob bosses in the city. My life consisted of drinking, going to casinos, collecting money, and wasting it. That was it.

One day I returned to my home and found my mother on her knees praying—she was actually praying for me! At this point in my “career,” the police were close to catching me. My life was filled with many problems, and I felt as though I was hanging between life and death, walking on a highwire, so to speak. My mother looked at me and handed me something. “Please read this,” she begged. It was the Gospel of John. Because I did not want to quarrel with my parents, and because I thought it would be a good deed, I sat down and read all twenty-one chapters.

The next day I returned to my gang. We were all together and preparing to start the business of the day. As we conversed, a man approached us and started yelling, “You cheated me! You have to give me back my money!” My friend took a long cigarette from his mouth, threw it in the man's face, slapped him on the head, and started screaming at him. The man was floored, taken aback by the wall of defense.

As I watched all of this, for the first time in my life, God's words came to mind: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” I knew that Jesus had said those words, and it prompted me

ONCE A MAFIA BOSS, NOW A SERVANT OF CHRIST. DORIN BLANCA GREETES FELLOW MEMBERS OF PROVIDENCE CHURCH IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE.





DORIN BLANCA STANDS WITH **SORIN PRODAN** AFTER THE WORSHIP SERVICE AT PROVIDENCE CHURCH IN BRAȘOV.

to think, “How do I love my neighbor?” In that moment, I realized, *I do not love*. I had thought that I was basically good. I thought I was on the “right side”—those in the gang, we were the good guys, the smart ones—and everyone else was just a weak and foolish person that deserved to be cheated and abused.

But for the first time in my life, I reconsidered. I understood I was wrong—very wrong! *I do not love*.

For six more years, as much as I tried to ignore it, I was bothered by that nagging feeling that I was wrong. Then something unexplainable happened to me. I began to find it almost impossible to spend the money that I had stolen. Whenever I tried to use the money, I had no peace in my mind or heart.

Although I knew almost nothing about the Bible, that one command from God’s Word about loving my neighbor as myself was torturing my conscience. I realized that gaining money through hurting and cheating others was wrong, and it took away all my peace.

Finally, after four more years, I could not take it anymore. I decided to withdraw from the mafia.

I had given ten years of my life to crime, but I could not continue. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I stayed home, but I longed to be back with my gang. There was a great fight in my heart! I was not yet saved, but God was working.

When I separated from the mafia, I passed through a very deep depression. I decided

to read the Bible, albeit incorrectly at first. I did not understand what I was reading and thought that I could save myself by doing exactly what the Bible said. I studied the laws and precepts of the Old Testament and attempted to keep them. I began to follow all kinds of Jewish traditions, and I even wanted to become a Jew. I prayed to God and said, “Lord, I want to be a Jew. I just want to be part of Your people.”

For the next ten years, I read the Bible five or six times. I studied the words of Jesus, but I only saw Him as a prophet. I believed that Jesus’ words were the words of God, and I tried to respect them. If someone slapped me on the cheek, I would turn the other one. If someone wanted to take my coat, I would give him my shirt. But even though I was sincerely trying to obey, I there was always hypocrisy. I was always seeking personal gain from what I did. My new business, which I tried to run honestly, was successful; I enjoyed a time of great prosperity. I took great pride in this—and that was the point. My entire motivation for following God’s law was for my own gain.

After a time, I listened to a Christian broadcasting program on the radio that explained the Bible. This is how I heard for the first time that Jesus Christ is God. But I did not believe it. I could not accept this reality, and I could not trust in Him as God. I believed that His words were good, but I could not entrust my life to Him because I thought He was just a man. I knew from my former life in the mafia that trusting in any man, even a friend, always resulted in disappointment. So I didn’t give trust to my friends, because one of my principles was that I would not have friends. That was the core issue; to trust Jesus was to acknowledge that He was my friend. I felt that if I trusted in the man Christ Jesus, I would soon be disappointed, just like I had been in all of my previous relationships.

I had no problem dealing with God; I had started my business with the core foundation that I would administer what the Lord had

“Looking back, I realize that there was something wrong—**there was a problem in my soul.** I was trying to do good deeds in order to ease my conscience and save myself.”

granted me. Doing business with God was easy. To become friends with Him? Absurd.

As I continued to try to be a follower of God, I began to have a sense that the kingdom of heaven was around me, but that it was not in me. It weighed so heavy on me that one day I laid on my floor and began to cry out, “Lord, please do something. Change something.” I stayed that way for over an hour, and I was exhausted. I picked up my Bible and read Jesus’ words: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30); and “Whoever honors the Son, honors the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). These verses brought me to the conviction that I actually *could* trust in Jesus as God. Jesus wasn’t just a man; He was God, one with the Father.

As time went on, I was still very bothered that I had cheated so many people. I decided that I would seek out and pay back everyone that I had wronged. I felt good about the deeds I was doing, but I continued to carry a great burden. I was constantly thinking about the bad that I had done and trying to avoid it again. Looking back, I realize that there was something wrong—there was a problem in my soul. I was trying to do good deeds in order to ease my conscience and save myself.

During this time, I passed by the place where Providence Church was meeting one night and decided to go in and sit down. The pastor was preaching about the paralyzed man, brought by his friends to Jesus. Luke

writes, “Seeing their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you’” (Luke 5:20). The people thought that Jesus was blaspheming. But Jesus asked, “What is easier? To say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up and walk?’” But knowing He had that power, Jesus told the paralyzed man to stand up and walk; and he did. Jesus did this miracle so everybody could see that He had the power to forgive. The pastor proclaimed, “Jesus came to solve the most important problem of any man. The problem of the paralyzed man was sin.” I had come to the church desperately trying to discover my problem and what I could do about it, and this preacher who did not even know me who did not even know me correctly diagnosed my problem. He looked at me and said, “Your problem is sin.” At that moment, I realized that I was a sinner. I was a man living in darkness but trying to do good works. I went home and prayed, “Lord, come to me, forgive my sin, and save my soul. I need Your salvation!” That day, Jesus Christ came to me and forgave my sin. My life was totally changed. I had started a new life with Christ.

The beginning of my journey was not easy. I realized that I was an angry man, and I could not control my anger. Things from my past kept coming back to haunt me. They troubled my heart, but I eventually realized that I could overcome anger. There was a time when a man cheated me and deliberately delayed his payments. I went home frustrated and confused at the challenges the day had brought, and I could not sleep that night. I prayed to Jesus, “Lord, bring me your peace. I have none of my own.” I slept like a baby. I realized that Christ had the power to change my life, and now I can testify that He has changed it dramatically. From one who was full of anger and revenge, Christ made me into a man who desires to bless anyone and everyone, anytime—even those who are against me.

I know that I have gained the greatest treasure—Christ is my treasure and my life. God’s love has made me free.



Reconciliation Through The Gospel

“One day in the Center Park, I shared the gospel with a homeless man named Cătălin. He was reluctant to come to church because he thought he was not presentable, but I told him the church could provide a shower, new clothes, even a place to live. He agreed and we sent him for a while to a Christian rehab center.

At first he did not like the Bible studies. He even thought, “Those people are crazy.” But one day the Spirit of God opened his eyes and his heart, and Cătălin became a believer. At one point he came to me and said that he wanted to reach his wife whom he had left seventeen years ago. Cătălin had been very violent, and his wife Marina did not want to return to their horrible life. But now Cătălin was a new man. I promised I would pray and help him reach his ex-wife.

Meanwhile Marina had become a Christian. But she was reluctant to reconnect, afraid that Catalin’s conversion was fake, and soon he would return to drugs and violence.

But we prayed for one year, and gradually God began to show Marina that Cătălin was truly born again. Eventually she accepted him, and I had the privilege of performing their marriage ceremony.

Today Cătălin is the most fervent evangelist in our church. He goes daily to the streets and shares the gospel with everyone he meets.

There are many such stories, by which the Lord has proved to us that He is with us, and bringing His Word into the streets is never in vain.”

—Sorin Prodan




CĂTĂLIN AND HIS WIFE MARINA SIT TOGETHER AFTER THE MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE AT PROVIDENCE CHURCH.

BLOOD **IN** BLOOD **OUT**

*A STORY OF GOD'S PROTECTION FROM ONE
OF THE MOST DANGEROUS GANGS IN
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.*

By Mario Maneville
PASTOR OF REFORMED COMMUNITY CHURCH



HeartCry Missionary Theo Robertson, a fellow worker with Mario Maneville, preaches an open-air sermon in front of Reformed Community Church in Bellville South. Before the Lord saved Him, Theo had been involved with gangs and drug dealing. But the Lord pierced his heart. In the same house where he used to sell his drugs, he bent his knee and cried out to the Lord to save him. Theo currently serves as a deacon in the church and is passionate about evangelism and street preaching.

Mario Maneville is the pastor of the Reformed Community Church (Baptist) in Bellville South, South Africa. He usually finds himself behind a pulpit and looking into the faces of a loving congregation. However, in the story you are about to read, you will find him out of his comfort zone and in the den of one of the most evil gangs in Cape Town. The story will not have a happy ending, but it will demonstrate the dangers that must be faced by those who preach and the consequences of turning back to the world! As you read Mario's words, please pray for His ministry.

THE FIFTH OF FEBRUARY began a month of daily evangelism for every member of our congregation. For four weeks, from Monday to Friday, our entire church went out to do street preaching and door-to-door evangelism in our township. If you knew the church in Bellville South, you would know that our street preaching is anything but subtle. We arrive with our loudspeakers, microphones, and musical instruments and host an open-air church service. We sing a couple of hymns, church members give their testimonies, and then a preacher takes his stand and delivers a sermon to the unsaved. There are many stories that I could tell you about how God has worked, but

one story stands out.

On the last day of our month of evangelism, we invited a pastor from another local church to preach in front of the house of our brother and faithful deacon, Theo. There were only two or three people in the street, and it seemed as though no one was even listening. However, as our brother continued to proclaim the gospel, one man drew closer. For the safety of those involved, I cannot use his real name, so we will call him “Jay.”

It was obvious that Jay was a gangster. He was smoking and showing disdain for everything that we were doing. He had no respect for God or men; nevertheless, it seemed that God was working. After the sermon, Jay came up to us crying. He admitted that he needed to change his life. We knew that he needed Jesus! After talking for a few minutes, we invited him into Theo’s home and preached the gospel to him. To our surprise and great delight, he bent his knees and cried out to the Lord to save him. It was beautiful! It seemed that God had wrought a miracle on the last day of a full month of evangelism. Everyone was weeping with joy!

We discovered afterwards that Jay was one of five leaders in the most notorious gang in the Cape Flats. He had been addicted to drugs since childhood and had murdered many people. The entire community was afraid of him. But his life was in utter ruin—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

For the first two weeks after his profession, Jay was our constant companion. He arrived early in the morning and stayed with us for the entire day. It was as if he was afraid to be alone. His fight against his drug addiction was fierce. He struggled terribly, but there were also beautiful moments when it appeared as though the grace of God was working in his heart.

It quickly became apparent to us that Jay needed to move from his home. His wife was also a drug dealer, and the place where

they lived was a den of temptation. Since our church had an apartment and since we had been looking for someone to care for our church building, we offered the job to Jay. He gladly and gratefully accepted. It seemed perfect! However, after a few months, we became concerned with some of Jay’s sinful habits that persisted even after multiple warnings by the elders. Jay had become religious and was trying to be moral, but it was unclear whether he had a personal relationship with the Lord.

Finally, I asked him, “Are you born again, or are you just rehabilitated? There is a difference.”

As the elders and I worked through these issues with him, there were many things that gave us hope of legitimate conversion. Jay’s wife had made a profession of faith, and the members of our church were involved in discipleship for both of them—the ladies were investing in her and the men were pouring into him. Their lives seemed to be improving.

It was a beautiful time. But then came the threats.

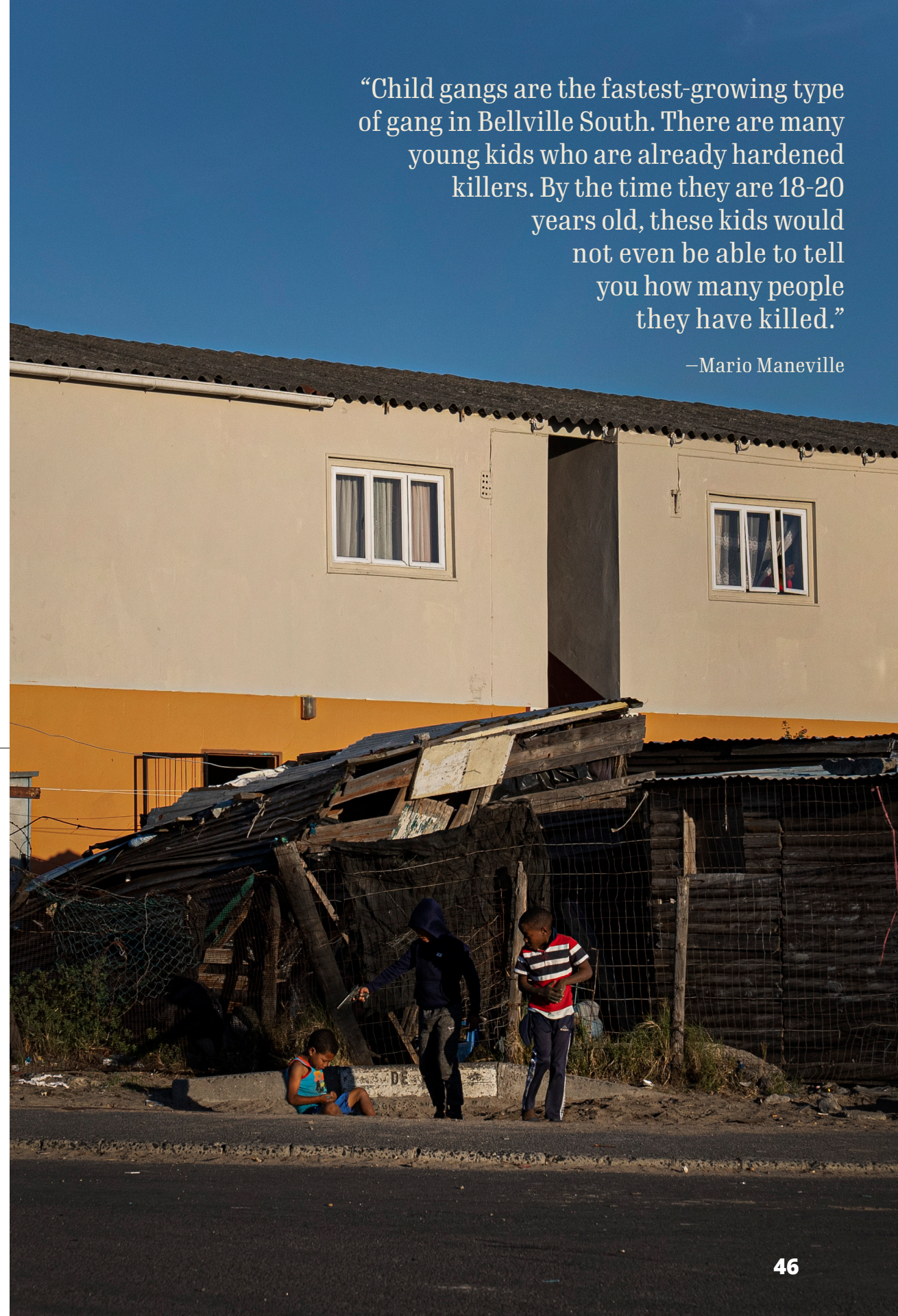
There were several suspicious attacks instigated against Jay’s family. His mother was mugged by two men from his old gang, and

Jay told us, “It’s **blood in, blood out**. The only way out of the gang is by bloodshed.”

then a man with a long knife chased his father down the street. Finally, gang members invaded his parents’ home and held the entire family hostage at gunpoint while they were robbed of their laptops, phones, and other valuables. No one was hurt, but they were terrified of what might come. Jay explained to us that this was the gang’s *modus operandi*, how they coerced renegade members to return to the fold. If the rogue gang member still could not be found after warnings like this, then the

“Child gangs are the fastest-growing type of gang in Bellville South. There are many young kids who are already hardened killers. By the time they are 18-20 years old, these kids would not even be able to tell you how many people they have killed.”

—Mario Maneville



Mario Maneville and Theo Robertson lead an outdoor prayer meeting at the conclusion of a typical open-air worship service. In this dangerous area, everything must be bathed in prayer.



gang would start killing his family members until he returned. Jay told us, “It’s blood in, blood out. The only way out of the gang is by bloodshed.” Knowing that the gang would kill off every member of his family until he presented himself before them, Jay decided to face his fears and confront the gang. When he informed me of his decision, I stopped him and said, “Look, before we do anything, we’re going to pray; we must run to God with this.”

That night, I called together the church, and we decided to dedicate the week to prayer and fasting. We prayed that God would give us wisdom and that He would show us His

way forward. I prayed that God would show Jay that He could be trusted in any situation, no matter how dire; even when confronting one of the most vile and dangerous gangs in Cape Town. Near the end of the week, I was convicted that I would have to practice what I preached. I could not tell Jay to trust God while I stayed behind where it was safe. I had to go with him! I did not make that decision flippantly—I knew there was a very good chance that neither he nor I would be coming back. When I talked about this with my wife, she replied, “God is sovereign. God is in control of this, and if we are trusting God

with this man’s life, then I am going to trust God with your life. If God brings you back, praise Christ. If He doesn’t, then He will see us through this.”

At the end of the week, Jay and I drove toward the area of the township that belonged to the gang. As we got closer, Jay became increasingly nervous. He mumbled to me that the best we could hope for was for them to pretend to let us go and then shoot us in the back of the head. At least we would not see the bullet coming.

“It is a good way to die,” he said.

The thought unnerved me, but I told Jay, “My prayer for you is that you will see the almightiness of our God—that you will see that He is mighty to save, whether we live or die.”

Jay did not understand my words, but kept repeating the same line over and over, “We’re not going to make it. We’re not going to make it. We’re not going to make it...”

I tried to reassure him, but he responded, “I know that leaving the gang is a death sentence because I was the enforcer. I was the one responsible for killing members who tried to leave.” As we were still on our way to meet this gang, Jay described some of the brutal and torturous ways that they had killed people, disposing their remains in the dump. He told me how they had stabbed one man forty-eight times for attempting to leave, without even giving him the opportunity to explain why!

Blood in, blood out.

Although I was shaken, I repeated, “Whatever happens, it is God who is in control.” In my heart, I prayed, “Lord, I want to see my kids again. I want to see my wife. But if I don’t, I’ll see Jesus today!” I sent a brief email to my brothers at HeartCry to tell them that I might be going to see Jesus in the next few minutes!

I have been in many frightening situations as a pastor in Bellville South, but this was something else. It was pure evil. It is no exaggeration to say that this gang is one of the

“I later learned that they had **also stabbed a pastor to death** in that same room. I thought to myself, ‘Men exactly like us have been murdered without a second thought **in the very place** where we are now standing!’”

most satanic in the Cape Flats area. They hold to the belief that they gain power by killing people. Many of them are professing Muslims, and many more are involved in witchcraft and other dark arts.

As we pulled up to the gang’s compound, I noticed that the gates were tall—the building stood out ominously from its surroundings. There were gangsters guarding the entrance, while others kept watch from across the street. Since only gang leaders are typically allowed into the compound, Jay entered without me. The guards knew that I was in the car and watched me carefully. One of them stood only a few feet away from me. I wanted to reach out and lock my doors when they were not looking, but I did not dare. One false move would have brought death. After a minute or two—though it seemed like hours—I was allowed to enter. There was one entrance into that dreadful place. I knew that once I entered, I was trapped. There was no escape!

We were led to a small room, the same room where Jay and his fellow gangsters had stabbed the man to death for wanting



The Cape Flats used to be known as the apartheid dumping ground. Blacks and “mixed people” were forcefully removed from central urban areas by the apartheid government to live in these government-built townships. However, what men meant for evil, God meant for good. (Genesis 50:20) A new church was planted—Reformed Community Church.

to leave. I later learned that they had also stabbed a pastor to death in that same room. I thought to myself, “Men exactly like us have been murdered without a second thought in the very place where we are now standing!” The first thing I noticed was a gangster sitting on a bed that doubled as a weapons depository. He was packaging drugs for lower-ranking gangsters to sell on the street. Another man sat in front of us, holding a marijuana pipe in one hand and a large knife in the other. He was only an arm’s length from me, and I remember thinking that he could have killed me on a whim.

Jay quickly began to explain why he had left the gang, how he had joined the church, and that I was his pastor. As he spoke, another man entered, and the room grew quiet. The leader had arrived! He purposefully rammed his shoulder into mine as he walked by, then turned and faced us. Jay immediately lowered his head, his eyes fixed to the floor. I could see that the leader had long scars on each cheek—most high-ranking gangsters have self-inflicted scars on their cheeks that com-

municate their rank, and this one had many. He was also dressed much better than the others that I had seen around the compound. After staring silently at me, he turned his eyes to Jay and engaged him in conversation. Jay held out his hands like a man pleading for his life. His eyes never left the floor, his lips quivering as he attempted to explain why he had left. I prayed silently, “Lord, please help him. If he shows this kind of fear, they are definitely going to kill us.”

Although the change was gradual, Jay began to gain a gospel boldness. He started telling the room about Jesus—the *real* Jesus. He then introduced me as his pastor. Immediately, the gang leader told me that he hated pastors and that we were all worse than any of the gangsters in Bellville South. He said that he had once attended church and found that the pastor was all about money and power. So he chose the street, because it was much more straightforward and honest to be a gangster than a preacher! I knew that if he was going to kill me, the time had arrived. However, to my surprise, I witnessed a miracle! I was able to

share the gospel with everyone in the room. I was preaching the gospel in the very place where we should have been killed immediately and without appeal. Where Christians were murdered for praying, I found grace to preach!

When I finished my brief sermon, the leader told the others to let Jay leave the gang, but with an oath. They promised that they would not harm him or his family, but he could never return to a life of crime and drugs. They warned him that they would be watching from a distance; if they ever found that he had lied to them about his faith or that it had all been a ploy for freedom, they would hunt him down and kill him. Jay agreed, and the leader told us that we could leave.

As I walked toward the door, I realized that

I could not just leave. I turned and asked, “Guys, can I pray for you?” Jay looked up at me with horror and an expression that communicated, “No, no, no! They’ll kill us!” But then another miracle happened: The gang leader allowed me to pray. I prayed the gospel again and asked God to make it fruitful among the men. After the prayer, we left safely—no bullets in the back of the head! As we drove away, Jay was ecstatic. He kept repeating, “Oh my word! What did God do? That was crazy!” God had delivered us from the hands of evil, and we were still alive. We returned to the church and were met with tears of joy and thanksgiving to God.

But this is where the happiness ends, where the end of our story begins.

At the end of that week, I traveled out of town to a pastors’ training conference. While I was there, I received several discouraging reports about Jay. He had left his wife and had returned to drug addiction and sin. The gangsters had given him the deal of a lifetime, but he had

“My prayer for you is that you will see the almightiness of our God—that you will see that **He is mighty to save whether we live or die.**”

done the one thing they had warned him not to do. I asked myself, “How could this have happened?” The Lord had revealed Himself to this man. He had experienced the love of the local church. God had delivered him from a terrifying death at the hands of satanic gangsters. He had experienced so many mercies and miracles from the Lord; but after witnessing God’s work in such an awesome way, he turned his back and denied Christ. This is a pastor’s greatest disappointment and grief. A person comes into the church professing Christianity and enjoying the love and benefits of God’s people—and then leave, forsaking Christ, hating the church, and returning to the mire of this world. It is pain that is felt by faithful pastors across the globe.

A few weeks later, we were informed that Jay had been hunted down and murdered by his old gang, just as they had pledged. Jay’s wife has also left the faith, and we can only hope that she has not turned back to a life of dealing drugs.

In light of these events, I have asked myself,

*What contradictions meet
In ministers’ employ!
It is a bitter sweet,
A sorrow full of joy:
No other post affords a place
For equal honor, or disgrace!*

*Who can describe the pain
Which faithful preachers feel;
Constrained to speak, in vain,
To hearts as hard as steel?
Or who can tell the pleasures felt,
When stubborn hearts begin to melt?*

*The Savior’s dying love,
The soul’s amazing worth;
Their utmost efforts move,
And draw their bowels forth:
They pray and strive, their rest departs,
Till Christ be formed in sinners’ hearts.*

“Was it all for nothing?” But faith answers, “No!” We have learned that *our God is an awesome God, willing to save—but you do not mess with Him*. He has shown Himself to be both merciful and holy. We have all learned to fear God profoundly through what we have seen with our own eyes. There will always be those that abuse the kindness of God and His church. They must give an account to God for their unfaithfulness; and we, as Christians, must give an account for how we treat them. Despite the world’s antagonism and the lament of our own failures, we can only ever continue to be the church—reaching out to the lost, supporting the weak, serving the needy, and presenting the gospel at every opportunity.

There is suffering in God’s work, but there is also joy and love. There is beauty in Him!



Mario is an elder at Reformed Community Church in Bellville South, South Africa. The joy and sadness of the events in this account are powerfully expressed in the hymn, “What Contradictions Meet,” by John Newton. It is worthy of being quoted at length:

*If some small hope appear,
They still are not content;
But, with a jealous fear,
They watch for the event:
Too oft they find their hopes deceived,
Then, how their inmost souls are grieved!*

*But when their pains succeed,
And from the tender blade
The ripening ears proceed,
Their toils are overpaid:
No harvest joy can equal theirs,
To find the fruit of all their cares.*

*On what has now been sown
Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;
The power is Thine alone,
To make it spring and grow:
Do Thou the gracious harvest raise,
And Thou, alone, shalt have the praise.*

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“MY GRANDFATHER TRIED TO KILL ME.”

After I was saved, I became a different person. My schoolmates as well as my teachers didn't recognize me anymore. I told everyone about God. I read the Bible, and I prayed at every opportunity. Some of my teachers cried when they saw the great change that had taken place in me.

But my grandparents were filled with rage. Apparently some mocked my grandfather because of my conversion, and he beat me. I told him that I would never give up on God, and that I would keep attending church.

He tried to murder me. He grabbed an ax, and swung to split me in half. I dodged, coming away with only a scratch. He then dropped

the weapon, and beat me with a chain.

I was bruised, beaten, and covered with my own blood, but I went to church. When I came home, my clothes were in a box by the gate, which was locked. I called the police, and my grandparents were forced to let me in. They still refused to give me food and firewood. It was tough, but the Lord was with me. I had no fire, but I didn't feel cold. I had God's Word. With tears of joy and amazement, I read verse after verse of the Holy Scriptures. They warmed my heart.



Andrei Crînganu is one of our newest HeartCry Missionaries in Romania. Read Andrei's full testimony online at: HeartCryMissionary.com

WHILE MINISTERING IN PERU, Brother Paul Washer helped with the building of a landing strip in the northern mountains for missionary pilot Glen Budd. Everyone watched as the plane descended through the gorge to make its first landing on the new strip. Compared to the mountains on both sides, the plane looked like a tiny speck. When the wheels touched the ground, the plane flipped over and skidded to a halt. Thankfully Glen was unhurt. The plane had to be taken apart on the runway, and pieces of it carried down the mountain by horses.

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